

Take nat my name in ydel, or amys.
Lo, rather he forbedeth swich sweryng
Than homicide, or many a cursed thyng;
I seye that, as by ordre, thus it stondeth;
This knowen, that his heestes understondeth,
How that the seconde beeste of God is that.
And forther over, I wol thee telle al plat
That vengeance shal nat parten from his hous,
That of his othes is to outrageous:
By Goddes precious herte, and by his nayles,
And by the blood of Crist that is in Hayles,
Sevene is my chaunce, and thyn is cynk and treye;
By Goddes armes, if thou falsly pleye,
This daggere shal thurghout thyn herte go!
This fruyt cometh of the bicched bones two,
forsweryng, ire, falsnesse, homicide.
Now for the love of Crist that for us dyde,
Lete youre othes, bothe grete and smale.
But, sires, now wol I telle forth my tale.



HISE riotours thre, of whiche I
telle,
Longe erst er prime rong of any belle,
Were set hem in a tavern for to
drynke;
And as they sat, they herde a belle
clynke
Biforn a cors, was carried to his grave.
That oon of hem gan callen to his knave:
Go bet, quod he, and axe redily,
What cors is this that passeth heer forby;
And looke that thou reporte his name weel.
Sire, quod this boy, it nedeth neveradeel,
It was me toold, er ye cam heer, two houres;
He was, pardee, an old felawe of youre,
And sodeynly he was yslayn tonyght,
fordronke, as he sat on his bench upright;
Ther cam a priver theef, men clepeth Deeth,
That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.
He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence;
And, maister, er ye come in his presence,
Me thynketh that it were necessarie
for to be war of swich an adversarie;
Beth redy for to meete hym everemoore;
Thus taughte me my dame; I sey namoore.
By Seinte Marie! seyde this taverner,
The child seith sooth, for he hath slayn this yeer,
Henne over a mile, withinne a greet village,
Bothe man and womman, child, and hyne, & page;
I trowe his habitacioun be there;
To been avysed greet wysdom it were,
Er that he dide a man a dishonour.
Ye, Goddes armes! quod this riotour,
Is it swich peril with hym for to meete?
I shal hym seke by wey and eek by strete,
I make avow to Goddes digne bones!
Herkneth, felawes, we thre been al ones;
Lat ech of us holde up his hand til oother,
And ech of us bicomen others brother,
And we wol sleen this false traytour, Deeth;
He shal be slayn, which that so manye sleeth,
By Goddes dignitee, er it be nyght!

GODIRES han thise thre hir trouthes
plight,
To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother,
As though he were his owene yboren brother;
And up they sturte al dronken, in this rage,
And forth they goon towardes that village
Of which the taverner hadde spoke biforn;
And many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn,
And Cristes blessed body they torente;
Deeth shal be deed, if that they may hym hente.
NAN they han goon nat fully half a mile,
Right as they wolde han troden over a
stile,

An oold man and a povre with hem mette.
This oold man ful mekely hem grette,
And seyde thus: Now, lordes, God yow see!
The proudeste of thisse riotours thre
Answerde agayn: What? carl with sory grace,
Why artow al forwrapped save thy face?
Why lyvestow so longe in so greet age?
This oold man gan looke in his visage,
And seyde thus: For I ne kan nat fynde
A man, though that I walked into Ynde,
Neither in citee nor in no village,
That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age;
And therefore moot I han myn age stille,
As longe tyme as it is Goddes wille.
Ne Deeth, alas! ne wol nat han my lyf;
Thus walke I, lyk a restelees kaitif,
And on the ground, which is my moodres gate,
I knokke with my staf, bothe erly and late,
And seye: Leve mooder, leet me in!
Lo, how I varysshe, flessch, and blood, and skyn;
Allas! whan shul my bones been at reste?
Mooder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste,
That in my chambre longe tyme hath be,
Ye! for an heyre clowt to wrappe me!
But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,
for which ful pale and welked is my face.
But, sires, to yow it is no curteisye
To speken to an oold man vileynye,
But he trespasse in word, or elles in dede.
In hooly writ ye may yourself wel rede,
Agayns an oold man hoor upon his heed,
Ye sholde arise; wherfore I yewe yow reed,
Ne dooth unto an oold man noon harm now,
Namoore than ye wolde men did to yow
In age, if that ye so longe abyde;
And God be with yow wher ye go or ryde;
I moot go thider as I have to go.

NY, olde cherl, by God, thou shalt nat so!
Seyde this oother hasardour anon;
Thou partest nat so lightly, by Seint John!
Thou spak right now of thilke traytour, Deeth,
That in this contree alle oure freendes sleeth;
Have heer my trouthe, as thou art his espye,
Telle wher he is, or thou shalt it abyde,
By God, and by the hooly sacrament!
for soothly thou art oon of his assent,
To sleen us yonge folk, thou false theef!
Now, sires, quod he, if that ye be so leef
To fynde Deeth, turne up this coked wey,
for in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,

Under a tree, and there he wole abyde;
Nat for youre boost he wole him nothyng hyde.
Se ye that ook? Right there ye shal hym fynde.
God save yow, that boghte agayn mankynde,
And yow amende! Thus seyde this olde man.
And everich of thisse riotours ran
Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde
Of floryns fyne of gold ycoyned rounde
Welny an eighte busschels, as hem thoughte.
No longer thanne after Deeth they soughte,
But ech of hem so glad was of that sighte,
for that the floryns been so faire and brighte,
That down they sette hem by this precious hoord.
The worst of hem he spak the firste word.
BRETHEREN, quod he, taak kepe what I
seye;

My wit is greet, though that I bourde and
pleye.
This tresor hath fortune unto us yiven,
In myrthe and jolitee oure lyf to lyven,
And lightly as it comth, so wol we spende.
Ey! Goddes precious dignitee! who wende
Today, that we sholde han so fair a grace?
But myghte this gold be caried fro this place
To myn hous, or elles unto youre,
for wel ye woot that al this gold is oures,
Thanne were we in heigh felicitee.
But trewely, by daye it may nat bee;
Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge,
And for oure owene tresor doon us honge.
This tresor mooste ycaried be by nyghte,
As wisely and as slyly as it myghte.
Wherfore, I rede that cut among us alle
Be drawe, and lat se wher the cut wol falle;
And he that hath the cut, with herte blithe
Shal renne to the towne, and that ful swithe,
And brynge us breed and wyn ful prively;
And two of us shul kepen subtilly
This tresor wel; and if he wol nat tarie,
Whan it is nyght, we wol this tresor carie
By oon assent, wheras us thynketh best.
That oon of hem the cut broghte in his fest,
And bad hem drawe and looke wher it wol falle;
And it fil on the yongeste of hem alle;
And forth toward the toun he wente anon.

AND al so soone as that he was agon,
That oon of hem spak thus unto that
oother:
Thow knowest wel thou art my sworne brother;
Thy profit wol I telle thee anon.
Thou woost wel that oure felawe is agon,
And heere is gold, and that ful greet plentee,
That shal departed been among us thre.
But natheles, if I kan shape it so
That it departed were among us two,
hadde I nat doon a freendes torn to thee?
That oother answerde, Inoot how that may be;
he woot how that the gold is with us tweye;
What shal we doon, what shal we to hym seye?
Shal it be conseil? seyde the firste shrewe,
And I shal tellen in a wordes fewe
What we shal doon, and brynge it wel aboute.
I graunte, quod that oother, out of doute,
h4

That, by my trouthe, I wol thee nat biwreye.
Now, quod the firste, thou woost wel we be
tweye,
And two of us shul strenger be than oon.
Looke whan that he is set, and right anon
Arys, as though thou woldest with hym pleye,
And I shal ryve hym thurgh the sydes tweye
Whil that thou strogelest with hym as in game,
And with thy dagger looke thou do the same,
And thanne shal al this gold departed be,
My deere freend, bitwixen me and thee.
Thanne may we bothe oure lustes al fulfillen,
And pleye at dees right at oure owene wille.
And thus acorded been thisse shrewes tweye,
To sleen the thridde, as ye han herd me seye.

HIS yongeste, which that wente unto the
toun,
ful ofte in herte he rolleth up and down
The beautee of thisse floryns newe and brighte.
O Lord! quod he, if so were that I myghte
Have al this tresor to myself allone,
Ther is no man that lyveth under the trone
Of God, that sholde lyve so murys as I!
And atte laste the feend, oure enemy,
Putte in his thought that he sholde poysoun beye,
With which he myghte sleen his felawes tweye;
forwhy the feend foond hym in swich lyvyng,
That he hadde leve hym to sorwe brynge,
for this was outrelly his fulle entente
To sleen hem bothe, and nevere to repente.
And forth he gooth, no longer wolde he tarie,
Into the toun, unto a pothecarie,
And preyde hym that he hym wolde selle
Som poysoun, that he myghte his rattes quelle;
And eek ther was a polcat in his hawe,
That, as he seyde, his capouns hadde yslawe,
And fayn he wolde wreke hym, if he myghte,
On vermyn, that destroyed him by nyghte.
The pothecarie answerde, And thou shalt have
A thyng that, al so God my soule save!
In al this world ther nis no creature,
That ete or dronke hath of this confiture,
Noght but the montance of a corn of whete,
That he ne shal his lif anon forlete;
Ye, sterve he shal, and that in lasse while
Than thou wolt goon a paas nat but a mile,
This poysoun is so strong and violent.

HIS cursed man hath in his hond yhent
This poysoun in a box, and sith he ran
Into the nexte strete, unto a man,
And borwed of hym large botels thre,
And in the two his poysoun poured he;
The thridde he kept clene for his owene drynke;
for al the nyght he shoop hym for to swynke
In caryng of the gold out of that place.
And whan this riotour, with sory grace
Hadde filled with wyn his grete botels thre,
To his felawes agayn repaireth he.

WHAT nedeth it to sermone of it moore?
for right as they hadde cast his deeth
bifoore,
Right so they han hym slayn, and that anon;
And whan that this was doon thus spak that oon:
103